

The Health and Safety Leadership Challenge

By Sheri Suckling, BSc

What makes a good leader?

Leadership researchers **Jim Kouzes** and **Barry Posner** asked this question, and their research on this issue led them to write their extraordinary book about evidence-based leadership, *The Leadership Challenge*. Their approach addresses leadership as a measurable, learnable, and teachable set of behaviors. They have developed a proven leadership model that proclaims leadership is everyone's business, and most importantly, that **critical leadership skills can be learned**.

The Leadership Challenge began with Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner's leadership research project in 1983. They sought to identify and quantify what people did when they were highly effective in leading others. Kouzes and Posner decided that they did not have to interview and survey star performers in excellent companies to discover best practices; they assumed that by asking ordinary people to describe extraordinary experiences, they would find patterns of success. They were right.

After completing preliminary research, Kouzes and Posner devised a **personal-best leadership survey** of thirty-eight open-ended questions like these:

- Who initiated the project?
- How were you prepared for this experience?
- What special techniques and strategies did you use to get other people involved in the project?
- What did you learn about leadership from this experience?

By 1987, Kouzes and Posner had carried out more than 550 such surveys, each requiring 1-2 hours of reflection and expression. A shorter two-page form was completed by another group of 80 managers at the same time, and the researchers completed a further 42 in-depth interviews. For the initial study, they examined the cases of middle and senior level managers in private and public sector organizations.

Since that initial study, Kouzes and Posner have expanded their research and collected thousands of additional cases, including stories from community leaders, student leaders, church leaders, government leaders, and hundreds of others in non-managerial positions. Every case had at least one leadership story to tell - stories that rarely sounded like textbook management - these were not cases of logical planning, organising, staffing, directing, and controlling. Instead, people offered dramatic tales of dynamic change and bold action. One case, for example, reported they had improved manufacturing productivity by more than 400% in just one year. In another organisation, quality improvements moved their products on a customer's vendor list in just three months from last to first. Another company grew its sales five-fold, achieving 750% profits over six years. In the not-for-profit and public sectors, Kouzes and Posner discovered a school system that moved its student performance results from the lowest percentile to the sixty-eighth

percentile in only two years, as well as an organization that successfully fought for legislation to protect abused and battered children.

Following the success of The Leadership Challenge, Kouzes and Posner went on to develop a **quantitative instrument for quantitatively measuring the vital leadership practices** they had identified. This tool is called the **Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)**.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® identified by Kouzes and Posner in their leadership model set out the essential leadership practices of success:

1. Inspire a shared vision.

What is your vision for health & safety in your own workplace?

What does it take for a vision to be inspiring?

Why is meant by a shared vision?

What is the real power of a shared vision that is inspiring?

2. Model the way.

What does it mean to model behaviours?

What excellent safety behaviours do you consistently model?

What employee behaviours do you see in employees that are not what you prefer (eg. – unsafe actions, risk-taking, etc)?

What behaviours could YOU do more of to promote H&S improvements?

Commitment to one action:

3. Challenge the process.

What does it mean to challenge the process?

How can you challenge effectively?

What works well and helps the process?

What doesn't work well and what can you do to change it?

Commitment to one action:

4. Enable others to act.

What does '**enable**' really mean?

How do you enable others?

What does enabling others allow you to do?

Commitment to action:

5. Encourage the heart.

Why does **encouragement** matter?

What does it take to make employee **recognition and rewards** effective?

How can you effectively **identify** and appropriately **reward** desired safety behaviours?

Commitment to action:

How will you take the **initiative** and make the **difference**?

References:

The Leadership Challenge www.leadershipchallenge.com/WileyCDA/

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner: www.kouzesposner.com/

About the Speaker:

Sheri Suckling - EnQuantum Ltd

Owner, Director, Principal Consultant

Sheri Suckling has over 30 years of business experience in a wide range of roles and diverse industries. Many of these roles featured key responsibilities in management systems and compliance requirements. In every case, Sheri has taken the initiative and extended herself through involvement in broader organizational projects, e.g. – taking on additional responsibilities for coaching and developing individual employees, leading learning and development initiatives, building effective teams, encouraging others, fostering personal responsibility, taking the lead in recruitment and selection of senior personnel in the absence of internal HR functions, and providing leadership and innovative approaches to organizational development and company culture.

Sheri has a knack for spotting improvement opportunities before they turn into problems and is adept at guiding people through the chaos of change. She is respected amongst her peers for her commitment to team success results as well as her initiative in providing innovative winning solutions responsive to holistic organizational needs.

Sheri's **qualifications and training** include:

- Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and General Business, completed concurrent with full-time employment with Dow Corning Corporation in Midland, Michigan, USA.
- Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), International certification - INLPTA
- AVI Values Inventory (Hall-Tonna) tools
- Spiral Dynamics (Clare Graves) Values & dynamics of change model
- Accelerated Learning – Eric Jensen (USA)
- Accredited Facilitator – Certificate in Applied Leadership – Tai Poutini Polytechnic (2006)

Specific **business training and experience:**

- Lead Assessor of Quality Management Systems
- Recognised Hazardous Substances Advisor (HSNO Act) – ERMENZ

- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)
- Food Safety / HACCP

Professional **Memberships** and Associations:

- New Zealand Institute of Safety Management (NZISM) – Auckland Branch Committee
- Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ)
- New Zealand Association for Training and Development (NZATD)
- Rotary Club of North Harbour (Roatarian of the Year 2006/07)
- Life Member – XL Results Foundation (international entrepreneurs' network)

Sheri has also been a popular speaker and facilitator for numerous conferences and events and is a sought-after training facilitator. Described by friends and colleagues alike as an energetic and voracious learner devoted to life-long self-improvement and personal development, Sheri continually builds her extensive array of tools and skills and adds further knowledge and skills by attending seminars, exploring ideas and assimilating new ideas and information. She actively maintains extensive professional networks to expand access to learning resources.